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MALIMBUS

Journal of West African Ornithology
Revue d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest Africain



VOLUME 33 Number 2

September 2011

ISSN 0331-3689

published by:
publiée par:

West African Ornithological Society
Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest Africain

West African Ornithological Society

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Some observations of birds and bird behaviour in Kinshasa and Bas-Congo Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Received 25 January 2010; revised 28 December 2010.

Summary

The distribution of many of the avian species of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is still not well known. The birds of the Kinshasa region and Bas-Congo province, in particular, have received little attention. I visited both areas during the dry season of 2009 (16 June to 5 July), spending four days in Kinshasa and environs, ten days in Boma, two in Maduda, and three in Muanda. I present species lists for each location. I observed a number of species outside of their currently known ranges, including the second record for DRC of Cape Glossy Starling *Lamprotornis nitens*, as well as Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*, Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*, Wahlberg's Eagle *Aquila wahlbergi*, White-collared Starling *Grafisia torquata* and House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. Instances of unusual bird behaviour observed include a Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* foraging behind a worker using a mechanical grass trimmer, and a Little Swift *Apus affinis* being harried by a butterfly.

Résumé

Quelques observations sur des oiseaux et leur comportement à Kinshasa et dans la province du Bas-Congo, République Démocratique du Congo. La distribution de nombre d'espèces d'oiseaux de la République Démocratique du Congo (RDC) n'est pas encore bien connue. Les oiseaux de la région de Kinshasa et de la province du Bas-Congo, en particulier, ont fait l'objet de peu d'attention. J'ai visité les deux zones pendant la saison sèche 2009 (du 16 juin au 5 juillet), en passant quatre jours à Kinshasa et les environs, dix jours à Boma, deux à Maduda et trois à Muanda. Je présente des listes d'espèces pour chaque lieu. J'ai observé nombre d'espèces hors de leurs aires de répartition connues actuellement, dont la deuxième observation pour la RDC du Choucador à épaulettes rouges *Lamprotornis nitens*, ainsi que du Faucon crécerellette *Falco naumanni*, de l'Ibis falcinelle *Plegadis falcinellus*,

de l’Aigle de Wahlberg *Aquila wahlbergi*, du Choucador à cou blanc *Grafnisia torquata* et du Moineau domestique *Passer domesticus*. Les cas de comportement inhabituel incluent un héron garde-bœufs *Bubulcus ibis* fouillant derrière un travailleur utilisant une tondeuse à gazon mécanique et un Martinet des maisons *Apus affinis* harcelé par un papillon.

Introduction

The birds of the Kinshasa district and the adjoining province of Bas-Congo in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have received little attention since the expeditions of Schouteden (1920, 1926, 1948–60) and Chapin (1932, 1939, 1953, 1954). The observation of Demey & Louette (2001) that “the within-country distribution of many species is ... still imperfectly known,” is particularly true of Kinshasa and Bas-Congo. I therefore discuss below the significant sightings I made during a recent trip to Kinshasa and Bas-Congo (16 June to 5 July 2009). While in the

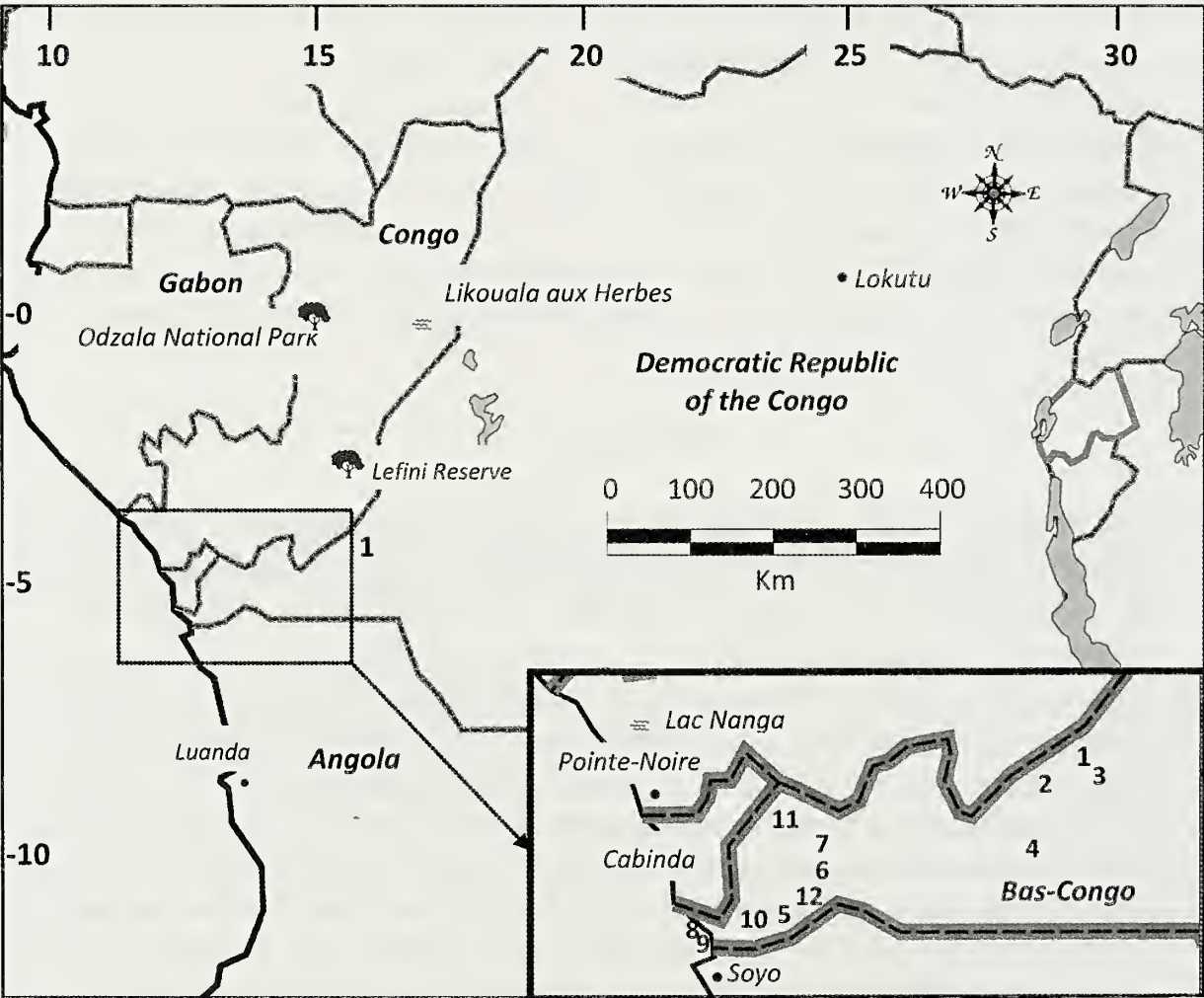


Figure 1. Sites mentioned in the text; see Table 1 for numbered localities.

field I used Borrow & Demey (2004), with additional information on range and distribution from Sinclair & Ryan (2003). I identified birds that were heard only, with the aid of Chappuis (2000). The sites at which I made my observations are shown on Fig. 1 and named in Table 1. Fig. 1 also indicates other sites mentioned in the text.

My observations provide new information on the ranges of several species or on species rarely recorded from Bas-Congo, among them: Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*, Wahlberg’s Eagle *Aquila wahlbergi*, Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*, White-collared Starling *Grafisia torquata*, and Cape Glossy Starling *Lamprotornis nitens*.

Table 1. Gazetteer of localities in Kinshasa and Bas-Congo, numbered as in Fig. 1.

Site	Coordinates	Time spent at sites visited
1 Kinshasa	4°18’S, 15°18’E	16, 17–19 Jun (mornings) Centre d’Accueil Protestant (CAP); 17 Jun (1 h late afternoon) Botanic Garden; 5 Jul (morning, early afternoon) Methodist-Presbyterian Hostel (MPH)
2 Lac de Ma Vallée (30 km west of Kinshasa)	4°30’S, 15°16’E	18 Jun (afternoon)
3 Le Jardin d’Eden (50 km east of Kinshasa)	c. 4°23’S, 15°29’E	17 Jun (afternoon)
4 Jardin Botanique de Kisantu	4°36’S 15°6’E	19 Jun (1 h in afternoon)
5 Boma	5°50’S, 13°3’E	19–29 Jun, Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de Boma (FACTEB) campus; brief visit to Congo River
6 Kinkonzi	5°37’S, 13°4’E	1 Jul c. 12h00–14h00
7 Maduda	4°53’S, 13°4’E	29 Jun, morning of 1 Jul
8 Muanda and Parc Marin des Mangroves (PMM)	5°55’S, 12°24’E	2 Jul, beach, grounds of ABC Junior Motel; 3 Jul, Motel grounds (early morning), then 4 h in PMM; 4 Jul, Motel grounds (early morning), then 2 h at a marsh
9 Banana	6°1’S, 12°42’E	
10 Mateba Island	5°54’S, 12°50’E	
11 Ganda-Sundi	4°52’S, 12°52’E	
12 Matadi	5°49’S, 13°29’E	

Results

All species observed are listed in Table 2, and I discuss species of special interest below it, including a few instances of unusual bird behaviour.

Table 2. Species observed (x) or heard only (h) at localities numbered as in Table 1.

	1CAP	1MPH	5	7	8	Others
Podicepitidae						
<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> Little Grebe						2
Phalacrocoracidae						
<i>Phalacrocorax africanus</i> Long-tailed Cormorant	x				x	
Ardeidae						
<i>Bubulcus ibis</i> Cattle Egret	x	x	x	x		
<i>Egretta garzetta</i> Little Egret	x				x	
<i>E. alba</i> Great Egret	x	x	x	x		
<i>Ardea purpurea</i> Purple Heron				x		
Ciconiidae						
<i>Leptoptilos crumeniferus</i> Marabou Stork				x		
Threskiornithidae						
<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i> Glossy Ibis	x					
Accipitridae						
<i>Gypohierax angolensis</i> Palm-Nut Vulture				x	x	x
<i>Polyboroides typus</i> African Harrier Hawk				x		
<i>Accipiter tachiro</i> African Goshawk	x			x	x	
<i>Aquila wahlbergi</i> Wahlberg's Eagle				x		
<i>Falco naumanni</i> Lesser Kestrel				x		
<i>F. tinnunculus</i> Common Kestrel	x					
Rallidae						
<i>Porphyrio alleni</i> Allen's Gallinule					x	
Jacanidae						
<i>Actophilornis africana</i> African Jacana					x	
Glareolidae						
<i>Glareola nuchalis</i> Rock Pratincole				x		
Columbidae						
<i>Treron calvus</i> African Green Pigeon				x		
<i>Turtur brehmeri</i> Blue-headed Wood Dove				x		
<i>T. tympanistreria</i> Tambourine Dove				x		
<i>T. afer</i> Blue-spotted Wood Dove	x	x	x			
<i>Columba livia</i> Rock Pigeon			x	x		1 city centre
<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i> Red-eyed Dove	x		x	x		
<i>S. capicola</i> Ring-necked Dove	x		x	x		

	1CAP	1MPH	5	7	8	Others
Psittacidae						
<i>Psittacus erithacus</i> Grey Parrot	x	x		x		
Musophagidae						
<i>Tauraco persa</i> Green Turaco				h		
Cuculidae						
<i>Chrysococcyx klaas</i> Klaas's Cuckoo		x				
<i>Centropus senegalensis</i> Senegal Coucal			x		x	
<i>C. monachus</i> Blue-headed Coucal				h		
Strigidae						
<i>Bubo africanus</i> Spotted Eagle Owl				h		
Apodidae						
<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i> African Palm Swift	x	x	x	x	x	
<i>Apus affinis</i> Little Swift	x		x		x	
Coliidae						
<i>Colius striatus</i> Speckled Mousebird	x	x	x	x	x	
Alcedinidae						
<i>Halcyon albiventris</i> Brown-hooded Kingfisher		x				2
<i>H. senegalensis</i> Woodland Kingfisher		x	x			1 Botanic Garden
<i>H. chelicuti</i> Striped Kingfisher			x		x	
<i>Alcedo cristata</i> Malachite Kingfisher		x				
<i>Ceryle rudis</i> Pied Kingfisher					x	
Meropidae						
<i>Merops pusillus</i> Little Bee-eater		x	x		x	
<i>M. bullockoides</i> White-fronted Bee-eater				x		
Coraciidae						
<i>Eurystomus glaucurus</i> Broad-billed Roller				x		
Upupidae						
<i>Upupa epops</i> Hoopoe				x	x	
Bucerotidae						
<i>Tockus fasciatus</i> African Pied Hornbill				x		
Ramphastidae						
<i>Pogoniulus atroflavus</i> Red-rumped Tinkerbird				x		
<i>P. bilineatus</i> Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird		x		x		6
<i>Tricholaema hirsuta</i> Hairy-breasted Barbet				x		
Picidae						
<i>Dendropicos goertae</i> Grey Woodpecker		x				
Hirundinidae						
<i>Psolidoprocne nitens</i> Square-tailed Saw-wing				x		
<i>Riparia cincta</i> Banded Martin					x	
<i>Hirundo abyssinica</i> Lesser Striped Swallow				x		
<i>H. rufigula</i> Red-throated Cliff Swallow				x		

	1CAP	1MPH	5	7	8	Others
<i>H. nigrata</i> White-throated Blue Swallow					x	
Motacillidae						
<i>Macronyx croseus</i> Yellow-throated Longclaw					x	
Pycnonotidae						
<i>Thescelocichla leucopleura</i> Swamp Palm Bulbul					x	
<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i> Common Bulbul	x	x	x	x	x	
<i>Nicator chloris</i> Western Nicator					x	
Turdidae						
<i>Turdus pelios</i> African Thrush		x				1 Botanic Garden
<i>Cichladusa ruficauda</i> Rufous-tailed Palm Thrush	x	x	x	x	x	
Muscicapidae						
<i>Myrmecocichla tholloni</i> Congo Moor Chat					x	
Cisticolidae						
<i>Cisticola erythrops</i> Red-faced Cisticola					x	
<i>Prinia subflava</i> Tawny-flanked Prinia		x			x	
<i>Camaroptera brachyura</i> Grey-backed Camaroptera					x	
<i>Hylia prasina</i> Green Hylia		x				
Platysteiridae						
<i>Dyaphorophyia castanea</i> Chestnut Wattle-eye		x				
<i>Batis minulla</i> Angola Batis		x				
Timaliidae						
<i>Illadopsis fulvescens</i> Brown Illadopsis					x	
Nectariniidae						
<i>Anabathmis reichenbachii</i> Reichenbach's Sunbird						3
<i>Cyanomitra verticalis</i> Green-headed Sunbird	x				x	
<i>C. rubescens</i> Green-throated Sunbird						4
<i>Chalcomitra fulginosa</i> Carmelite Sunbird						3
<i>Cinnyris chloropygius</i> Olive-bellied Sunbird	x	x				4
<i>C. minullus</i> Tiny Sunbird						6
<i>C. bifasciatus</i> Purple-banded Sunbird					x	x
<i>C. superbus</i> Superb Sunbird					x	x
<i>C. cupreus</i> Copper Sunbird						x
Laniidae						
<i>Lanius mackinnoni</i> MacKinnon's Shrike					x	
Malaconotidae						
<i>Dryoscopus senegalensis</i> Black-shouldered Puffback		x				
Corvidae						
<i>Corvus albus</i> Pied Crow	x	x	x		x	
Sturnidae						
<i>Onychognathus fulgidus</i>						
Forest Chestnut-winged Starling					x	

	1CAP	1MPH	5	7	8	Others
<i>Lamprolornis nitens</i> Cape Glossy Starling			x			
<i>L. splendidus</i> Splendid Glossy Starling			x			2
<i>Grafisia torquata</i> White-collared Starling					x	
Passeridae						
<i>Passer griseus</i> Northern Grey-headed Sparrow	x	x	x	x		
<i>P. domesticus</i> House Sparrow					x	
Ploceidae						
<i>Ploceus pelzelni</i> Slender-billed Weaver	x		x			3
<i>P. nigricollis</i> Black-necked Weaver				x		
<i>P. ocularis</i> Spectacled Weaver				x		
<i>P. nigerrimus</i> Vieillot's Black Weaver				x		
<i>P. cucullatus</i> Village Weaver				x		
<i>Euplectes macroura</i> Yellow-mantled Widowbird			x			NE of 12 on road from 1
<i>E. ardens</i> Red-collared Widowbird			x			
Estrildidae						
<i>Estrilda perreini</i> Grey Waxbill			x			
<i>E. astrild</i> Common Waxbill						6
<i>Uraeginthus angolensis</i> Southern Cordon-bleu	x	x	x	x		
<i>Pytilia melba</i> Green-winged Pytilia				x		
<i>P. afra</i> Orange-winged Pytilia				x		
<i>Lagonosticta rubricata</i> Blue-billed Firefinch				x		
<i>Spermestes cucullata</i> Bronze Mannikin	x	x	x	x		
<i>S. bicolor</i> Black-and-white Mannikin					x	
Fringillidae						
<i>Serinus capistratus</i> Black-faced Canary	x	x	x	x		
<i>S. mozambicus</i> Yellow-fronted Canary				x		

***Egretta ardesiaca* Black Heron.** Seen every year (Jan–Mar, most numerous in Jan) by T.M. Ntsankete (pers. comm.) in marshes at west end of PMM. Previously observed August at mouth of Congo, exact location not given (Lippens & Wille 1976). Two specimens, now in Royal Museum of Central Africa, collected Banana and Muanda, Dec 1951 (Dean & Le Maitre 2006, M. Louette pers. comm.). Uncommon Angola, apparently not recorded north of Luanda (Dean *et al.* 1988); Congo-Brazzaville records confined to Likouala aux Herbes River (Mokoko Ikonga & Rainey 2005, Rainey *et al.* 2009).

***Bubulcus ibis* Cattle Egret.** One intently following a golf course maintenance worker who was using a grass trimmer, Gombe district of Kinshasa, 17 Jun. The bird was walking c. 2 m to the side of the worker, apparently waiting for prey stirred up by the trimmer. Cattle Egrets have previously been observed associating with people cutting grass with sickles (Menon 1981).

***Plegadis falcinellus* Glossy Ibis.** One soaring above CAP on the morning of 19 Jun, (all dark; legs trailing; thin, delicate neck; small, rounded head). A migrant in the DRC, according to Lippens & Wille (1976). In Angola, common in southwest (Dean 2000); no records for Congo-Brazzaville.

***Aquila wahlbergi* Wahlberg's Eagle.** One heading southeast above FACTEB campus, 25 Jun (appeared all black, wings long, narrow, leading and trailing edges parallel). Another soaring (hunting?) 100–150 m above hills east of campus, c. 12h00, 27 Jun (appeared dark monochrome brown verging on chestnut, no barring or streaking on underparts, tail barely fanned). At c. 13h30, same day, a tight group of three at a distance of c. 400 m soaring 100 m, above the campus and heading northeast. Common from southern Bandundu (province adjacent to the south and west of Bas-Congo) southeastwards (www.pesic-pedersen.com/drc/checklists.html, accessed 9 Jan 2010); one tracked by satellite over western Bandundu, c. 175 km east of Kinshasa, Apr and Aug 1994 (Meyburg *et al.* 1995). In Congo-Brazzaville, observed in the Lefini Reserve in 2007 (King 2011). In Angola, most common in south; uncommon in Cabinda, where likely a passage migrant (Dean 2000). This species' migratory movements are not properly understood (Brown *et al.* 1982, Meyburg *et al.* 1995). Some birds might take a more westerly route than the individual tracked by Meyburg *et al.* (1995). Since it is known to migrate in flocks (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001), it is possible that the three I saw heading north were migrants.

***Falco naumanni* Lesser Kestrel.** An adult male circled below me, at a distance of c. 50 m, over baobabs in a ravine south of FACTEB campus, late morning 22 Jun. I observed possibly the same bird for c. 5 min. at just above eye level, 3–4 h later. I saw well the unspotted chestnut mantle and lesser and median wing coverts, darkish blue-grey head and diagonal strip on inner wing, blackish outer wings contrasting with pale (and plain) blue-grey rump and tail. Adult male Lesser Kestrel is “unmistakable in reasonable view” (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001). During the second observation the bird soared and occasionally hovered, especially where grass had been trampled by grazing cattle. It was silent, a characteristic of this species when not breeding (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001). Common Kestrel *F. tinnunculus* lacks the distinctive coloration noted above, which I saw well in good light on both occasions. Lesser Kestrel winters in semi-arid savannas of sub-Saharan Africa, and leaves wintering grounds by mid-May (Brown *et al.* 1982) but may occur as a straggler in all DRC (www.pesic-pedersen.com/drc/checklists.html, accessed 9 Jan 2010). Also recorded in Congo-Brazzaville (Malbrant & Maclatchy 1949) and Angola, where so far known only from the southwest (Dean 2000).

***Chrysococcyx klaas* Klaas's Cuckoo.** A juvenile uttering begging calls and being fed by a pair of Tawny-flanked Prinias *Prinia subflava* on the grounds of MPH, 5 Jul. Known to parasitise warblers (Payne & Sorenson 2005).

***Apus affinis* Little Swift.** One being harried by a white moth or butterfly at CAP. The two were flying level, 20–30 m overhead. The insect, which had a wingspan of c. 12

cm, kept pace with the bird, which is not considered to be a strong flier (Fry *et al.* 1988), matched its every attempt at evasion and prodded it from time to time. The swift seemed to be trying to shake off its tormentor. Such behaviour is reminiscent of some butterflies that engage in aerial contests for mating territories (Kemp 2000). Some species of African butterflies have been known to attack Pied Crows *Corvus albus* and dogs if they perceive them to be threats (L.A. Depew pers. comm.).

***Hirundo abyssinica* Lesser Striped Swallow.** One feeding under the eaves at the front entrance of my residence at FACTEB. I was less than 2 m away from the bird at times. It sometimes perched briefly on the porch light socket while picking (dead?) insects from the light-bulb.

***Psolidoprocne nitens* Square-tailed Saw-wing.** Three foraging low over a forest clearing, c. 5 km west of Maduda, 30 Jun. In 1931 Chapin (1953) saw a flock of adults and young of subspecies *P. n. nitens* at Ganda Sundi, but did not record it elsewhere in the (Belgian) Congo. Not uncommon in Cabinda (Dean 2000); in Congo-Brazzaville found in forest edges in the Mayombe (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1991).

***Anabathmis reichenbachii* Reichenbach's Sunbird.** A very vocal male (cf. Cheke & Mann 2001) seen well at c. 10 m (metallic blue head and throat, grey chest and belly, yellow under-tail coverts, olive back) in a low bush, Jardin d'Eden c. 100 m from the N'sele River, 17 Jun. Scarce in DRC (Cheke & Mann 2001, Fry *et al.* 2000), from mouth of Congo eastward (Lippens & Wille 1976). Specimen collected at Muanda by Vrijdagh (Schouteden 1948–1960, vol. 8). In Congo-Brazzaville locally common along the coast and inland to Lac Nanga (Dowsett-Lemaire *et al.* 1993). In Angola, uncommon in similar habitat in northern Lunda Norte and Cabinda (Dean 2000).

***Cinnyris minullus* Tiny Sunbird.** A male foraging c. 9 m up in a tree-crown, on a residential street near forest edge in Kinkonzi, 1 Jul. It descended to a bare branch c. 4 m from ground, where it preened for at least 1 min.. The short, slightly decurved bill was clearly visible. Olive-bellied Sunbird *C. chloropygius*, can occupy similar habitat, but forages at lower level and has a longer curved bill (Cheke & Mann 2001, Sinclair & Ryan 2003). Cheke & Mann (2001) consider *C. minullus* common in DRC, although their range map seems to exclude it from the Mayombe, as does that of Lippens & Wille (1976). Seen twice at Lac de Ma Vallée by D.O. Matson (pers. comm.): 3–4 birds feeding in bushes adjacent to forest, 16 Feb 2008; one near same area, 3 Jul 2009. Not recorded in Angola (Dean 2000). In Congo-Brazzaville, restricted to the Mayombe, gardens and forest edges (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1991).

***Grafisia torquata* White-collared Starling.** One observed by P. Mavuemba and me in savanna in PMM, c. 10 km southwest of Muanda, 3 Jul. It was perched on a 1.5 m bush and presented clear frontal views at < 20 m. It was just over 20 cm in length, all-black with prominent white collar, and had the appearance of a small round-headed starling. The site was c. 5 km from mangrove forests of the Congo estuary, in apparently appropriate habitat: dry, flat, sandy-soiled, wooded savanna with palms and baobabs of c. 15 m. P. Mavuemba (pers. comm.) has since seen another two

individuals *c.* 5 km apart and 20 km from the site of the first observation. This is far south of the previously-known range. Rare in DRC (Lippens & Wille 1976), until recently known only in northeast (Finch *et al.* 2004). However, a flock of 20 was recently seen in fruiting trees along the Congo River near Lokutu, 450 km south of its previously-known range in DRC (Finch *et al.* 2004). Our sighting was 900 km southwest of this and 800 km south of Odzala NP, site of the only records for Congo-Brazzaville (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1998), where it is considered a vagrant (Dowsett-Lemaire 1997). Not yet recorded in Angola (Dean 2000). Occurs in open woodland and seems to require tall trees (Feare & Craig 1998).

***Lamprolornis nitens* Cape Glossy Starling.** One perched in a baobab in a ravine south of FACTEB, 22 Jun. I had clear telescope views for *c.* 60 s at *c.* 50 m. It appeared to be 22–25 cm long, had glossy blue-green plumage, yellow eye, rounded head and no discernible ear-patch. Splendid Glossy Starling *L. splendidus* (seen three times in preceding five days) is noticeably larger, has an ear-patch, appears flat-headed, has longer and thicker bill, and is proportionally longer-tailed. Purple-headed Glossy Starling *L. purpureiceps* has the eye black. Chapin (1954) saw only a single flock of *L. nitens* in the Lower Congo, between Matadi and Kinshasa, but gave no detailed description or precise location, and Lippens & Wille (1976) considered it uncommon,, probably based on Chapin's sighting. Schouteden (1948–1960, vol. 8) mentioned reports from the mouth of the Congo and Mateba Island; the former record is probably that of Sharpe & Bouvier (1878) from San Antonio da Zaire (= Soyo, Angola) (R.J. Dowsett pers. comm.), the latter was based on a specimen collected by Dubois (1905), which has recently been confirmed as *L. nitens* (M. Louette pers. comm.), and which is therefore the only confirmed DRC record prior to my own. Two observations in Congo-Brazzaville (Dowsett-Lemaire *et al.* 1993, Dowsett-Lemaire 1997). Common resident in Angola (Dean 2000), including Cabinda and Zaire Province, which adjoin Bas-Congo; seen daily at Soyo, Oct 2006 (Dean & Le Maitre 2008).

***Passer domesticus* House Sparrow.** One male (crown and rump grey, black bib, sides of head white) foraging on a street in Muanda, 3 Jul. Perhaps the first observation for Bas-Congo. Other males seen there since by P. Mavuemba (pers. comm.), sometimes in small groups of Northern Grey-headed Sparrow *P. griseus*. House Sparrow was also seen in Kinshasa, 16–17 Feb 2008 and 1 Jul 2009 (D.O. Matson pers. comm.). First recorded in Congo-Brazzaville at Pointe-Noire, Nov 2005 (Rainey *et al.* 2009). Probably established in southern Angola by mid-1970's (Dean 2000, Dean & Le Maitre 2008) but date of arrival unknown (Dean 2000); seen daily in Soyo, May 2006 (Dean & Le Maitre 2008).

Acknowledgments

I thank Dr Mabiala Justin-Robert Kenzo, Ambrose Seminary (Calgary, Alberta) and rector of FACTEB, for inviting me to Boma and arranging my visit. René and Cecelia

Holvast provided hospitality and warm companionship during my stay. Dr Pierre Mavuemba found accommodation in Muanda, accompanied me on my excursions there and contributed sight records. Thomas Mfu Ntsankete of PMM oversaw my tours of the park and contributed records of Black Heron. Major Samson Babaka Nzau served as a “military escort”. Pastor Donatien Tsumbu Tsumbu saw me through immigration and helped retrieve my luggage. Mr Lucain Ntoto was my driver in Kinshasa. R.J. Dowsett alerted me to early records, and he, Tony King and W.R.J. Dean commented on the manuscript and provided additional bibliography. They, Bob Cheke, Michel Louette, Tommy Pedersen, Hugo Rainey, R. Slotow, Ted Goshulak, Gus Yaki and my wife Diane (Ambrose University College Library) offered advice and provided articles. David O. Matson provided me with sight records from his numerous visits to the DRC. L.A. Depew sent information on butterflies. Ron Demey provided taxonomical guidance. Wes Campbell and Barbara Quaale compiled the maps.

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Notes on the breeding biology of the Loango Weaver *Ploceus subpersonatus* and its adaptation to urban habitats

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Received 14 March 2011; revised 4 August 2011.

Summary

From 2007 to 2009, the Loango Weaver was regularly observed in and around Port-Gentil, Gabon. One nest was found in a *Eucalyptus* tree, another in farmland close to an industrial area. Two juveniles were fed boiled rice by an adult male in a suburban garden. Loango Weavers can thus breed in suburban areas. The nest and the plumage detail of two juveniles of the Loango Weaver are described for the first time.

Résumé

Notes sur la reproduction du Tisserin à bec grêle *Ploceus subpersonatus* et son adaptation à un milieu urbain. De 2007 à 2009, le Tisserin de Loango a été observé régulièrement dans la ville de Port-Gentil et ses environs. Un nid a été trouvé sur un *Eucalyptus*, un autre dans des champs situés à proximité d'une zone industrielle. Deux jeunes ont été nourris de riz bouilli par un male adulte dans un jardin de banlieue résidentielle. Ces éléments prouvent que le Tisserin de Loango est capable de se reproduire dans une zone urbanisée. Sont décrits pour la première fois le nid et le détail du plumage de deux juvéniles du Tisserin de Loango.

Introduction

The Loango Weaver is an endemic resident of the Atlantic coast from Gabon to Northern Angola, recorded historically from Cabinda (Dean 2000) in Angola, along the Congo River in DRC (Chapin 1954) and coastal Gabon (Rand *et al.* 1959). Regarded as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List (Birdlife International, 2000), it was formerly considered rare, although recent sightings suggest that this is not the case, and that it occurs over a wider distributional range than previously thought. It is now known in Gabon from Akanda National Park (Christy 2001) and the Port-Gentil area (Sargeant 1993), in the Congo from Pointe Indienne, Pointe Noire (Bulens & Dowsett

2001) and 3 km west of Fouta (one male on 6 Apr 2008, pers. obs.). There is also a recent record from Soyo in Northern Angola (Dean & Le Maitre 2007).

The Loango Weaver is poorly known (Collar & Stuart 1985), and occurs in swamp forest, mangroves and savanna margins (Fry *et al.* 2004), secondary habitats near water and seasonal swamps (Bulens & Dowsett 2001), mainly in the vicinity of small patches of swamp forest surrounded by savanna (*e.g.* on Mandji Island, Gabon, pers. obs.). The presence of water seems to be common to all the habitats frequented by the Loango Weaver. It has been recorded to nest on *Caesalpinia bonduc* (Birdlife International 2000), on the Black Mangrove tree *Avicennia nitida*, on *Chrysobalanus icaco* (a small tree of coastal savannas), and most frequently on the palm *Phoenix reclinata*, which seems to be its favoured nesting tree in natural habitat (P. Christy pers. comm.). However, the Loango Weaver has not been recorded nesting on *Rhizophora* (P. Christy pers. comm.) although the birds occur in habitat adjacent to *Rhizophora* mangroves.

There is apparently no published information about the breeding period of the Loango Weaver. It is estimated, but without documented records, as from September to March and May for nest building, and from July to August and October to March for the begging immatures (Alexander-Marrack 1990). The eggs are reported to be “pink, spotted with brown” and the nest to “resemble those of *Ploceus nigricollis*” (Alexander-Marrack 1990), which seems to be the first known description of its eggs and nest. The soft parts of the female have also not been described. In this note I present some observations, made from 2007 to 2010, on the breeding biology of the Loango Weaver and its occurrence within suburban areas.

Results

On 25 Jul 2007, a nest of Loango Weaver was found under construction by a male and a female (Fig. 1), and another complete nest was found a few meters away (Fig. 2), in degraded farmland several hectares in area. These are the first published pictures of Loango Weaver nests. The nests were attached to a small White Mangrove *Laguncularia racemosa*, 1.5–2 m above water in a 2-m wide drainage ditch. The nest site was 100 m from one of the main roads at Port-Gentil, between the airport track and a residence for timber workers. A male was frequently seen in the early mornings flying over the road towards his nest, until the farmland was cleared early 2009.

On 13 Dec 2009, a male and female Loango Weaver were seen to leave another nest (Fig. 3) in a mixed patch of mangroves, savanna, native swamp forest and introduced *Eucalyptus* forest at the northern part of Cap Lopez. The nest was also 1.5 m above water, attached to a *Eucalyptus* tree.

Both completed nests had a retort shape (Figs 2 and 3), quite similar to those of *Ploceus nigricollis* (Fry *et al.* 2004, p. 117, type B) but with a shorter entrance tube. They both had a spherical chamber of *c.* 10 cm in diameter, with a vertical entrance

tube 10 cm long and *c.* 4–5 cm in diameter. Both were made of grass, mainly dry leaves but also some thin and flexible stems. The nests were not tightly woven, and presented a somewhat loose appearance from the outside.

On 31 Oct 2009, a male and two juvenile Loango Weavers were observed in a residential area of Port-Gentil, feeding on boiled rice put out for garden birds. The male also fed the juveniles with boiled rice, although the juveniles fed by themselves on rice on the ground. At least one juvenile constantly begged for food when the male was close, and regularly flicked its wings while doing so. This juvenile (Fig. 4: first published picture of a juvenile Loango Weaver) had a pale pink gape. It was olive on the back, upper wing-coverts and the top of the head, with a smooth transition to the yellowish face. The underparts were yellowish as well, with a slightly paler throat. The wings and tail were greyer and much darker than the upperparts, with olive-yellow fringes, broader on the tertiaries than on the secondaries and primaries. The bill and legs had a greyish pink (horn) colour. The juvenile Loango Weaver is thus very similar to the juvenile Black-necked Weavers *P. nigricollis brachypterus* observed in the area, but the latter have a paler, slightly longer and slightly thinner bill, as well as a blackish forecrown and a faint black eyebrow.

The other juvenile was apparently older than the first one. It fed most often by itself and did not show an obvious gape. It was olive overall, including the underparts and face, which gave it a darker appearance than the first bird. The wings and tail had the same darker greyer colour with olive-yellow fringes, but the fringes were more apparent on the secondaries and primaries. The bill and legs were darker, pinkish grey.

These descriptions match the available descriptions of the immature Loango Weaver, which is “as adult female, but with darker, dull olive forehead, and paler, brownish bill” (Borrow & Demey 2001), “duller than female, with brown bill” (Del Hoyo *et al.* 2010) and with a “paler bill” (Sinclair & Ryan 2003)

The juveniles were able to fly short distances but were not very mobile. These observations were made 100 m from the seashore but within the town of Port-Gentil, and 1 km away from the closest undisturbed area. The area includes many gardens, some vacant lots and also one 5-m wide drainage waterway. Other birds at the feeding site were two Red-Eyed Doves *Streptopelia semitorquata*, two Laughing Doves *S. senegalensis*, two Common Bulbuls *Pycnonotus barbatus*, two Grey Sparrows *Passer griseus*, five Bronze Mannikins *Spermestes cucullata*, and three Slender-billed Weavers *Ploceus pelzelni*. No competition for food or any interactions were observed between those species and the Loango Weavers. A few months earlier, an adult male Loango Weaver was seen occasionally feeding on rice at the same place.

Finally, on 15 Aug 2009 at Cap Lopez, a few km from Port Gentil, one female Loango Weaver was observed feeding a juvenile sitting on small bushes, at the edge between a swamp forest and a freshwater swamp. The juvenile was similar to that pictured in Fig. 4, but with a slightly paler bill. The female had a black bill, pinkish-grey legs and feet, and pale horn claws. This appears to be the first description of the female soft part colours.



Figure 1. Male Loango Weaver building a nest, July 2007.



Figure 2. Nest of Loango Weaver on *Laguncularia racemosa*, July 2007.



Figure 3. Nest of a Loango Weaver on a *Eucalyptus* tree, December 2009.

Discussion

The breeding dates (begging immatures August and October, nest visit in December) are mostly consistent with the previous observations mentioned above (Alexander-Marrack 1990). The July nest building date is also not unexpected given the observations of begging immatures in August and from October to March (Alexander-Marrack 1990). The breeding season thus seems to be either irregular or spread throughout the year, and it is difficult to deduce a clear breeding pattern from the scarce available data. An irregular pattern would not be an isolated case in the area,



Figure 4. Juvenile Loango Weaver feeding on rice.

since the Black-necked Weaver may breed in most months in Gabon, although with reduced activity during the dry season from June to September (Del Hoyo *et al.* 2010).

The Loango Weaver has been shown to live in secondary habitats such as the vegetation surrounding small coastal villages (Birdlife International 2000) and has been observed feeding on bread in small cities like Omboue and Sette Cama (P. Christy pers. comm.). This suggests that Loango Weavers can live close to settlements. They quite possibly nested in the Port-Gentil suburbs in 2009: the two juvenile Loango Weavers observed there were not very good fliers. There was also open water in the surroundings due to a drainage waterway, and thus it is likely that Loango Weavers are able to find favourable nesting conditions in the disturbed habitats of the Port-Gentil suburbs. There is apparently no strict preference for a particular tree species for nest sites, since several species, including one alien species (*Eucalyptus* sp.) were used as nest sites.

In Port-Gentil, most of the suburban area is well-vegetated and humid. The high-class residential areas contain a lot of gardens, and the allotments of labourers that expand into regularly flooded areas often allow the original vegetation of freshwater swamps to remain, with in consequence species not often found close to development, such as African Jacana *Actophilornis africanus* or Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* occurring alongside the houses (pers. obs.). One of the most common urban species in Port-Gentil is the Slender-billed Weaver, which has been considered to form a superspecies (Hall & Moreau 1970) or a species group (Sibley & Monroe 1990) with

the Loango Weaver. Slender-billed Weavers, restricted in West Africa to mangroves and marshes along coastal lagoons and river banks (Borrow & Demey 2001) can be found almost everywhere in the town and have apparently managed to adapt well to urban conditions there. Similarly, the Loango Weaver may be able to survive, perhaps at lower densities, inside an urban or suburban area.

However, it is not known whether the Loango Weaver is able to develop a viable population inside an urbanized area. The swamp forest of Cape Lopez, its core nesting area on Mandji Island, is threatened by the expansion of Port-Gentil (Birdlife International 2000) and should be kept in good condition to maintain the natural breeding sites and ensure the survival of the Loango Weaver on the island. More details on the ecology and breeding biology of the Loango Weaver are required to assess its exact ecological needs before concluding that it has indeed adapted well enough to survive as a viable population in urban habitats, or to revise its currently "Vulnerable" status.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank particularly Patrice Christy for his advice and unpublished communications on the Loango Weaver.

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Short Notes — Notes Courtes

Observation of a Heuglin's Wheatear *Oenanthe heuglini* in the Djoudj National Park: a new species for Senegal

In the cool morning of 18 Jan 2007, in a small acacia wood with large areas of open steppe, at Poste de Gainthe (16°23'N, 16°15'W) in the Djoudj National Park, NW Senegal, our attention was drawn to a bird running across the open sandy ground under the trees. It resembled a female Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* but was generally darker. We spent 10 min. observing the bird, which seemed to stand a little more upright, with relatively longer legs, than Northern Wheatear (Fig. 1). The median and greater coverts, secondaries and primaries were dark brown with indistinct narrow yellowish fringes. The dark brown was uniform, with no paler area on the secondaries. The back, nape and crown were all a uniform dark brown and there was little contrast between the dark remiges and dark brown back. The narrow white supercilium, which was not very extensive behind the eye, contrasted strongly with the dark brown crown and blackish eye-stripe and lores. Behind the eye, the dark eye-stripe merged into the brown of the nape. The ear coverts were brown and the throat whitish. The primary projection was shorter, or similar in length, to the tertials. The tail appeared all black, with no white visible on the sides; but we did not see the bird fly, so narrow white sides to the base of the tail may have been hidden by the wings. Below, the breast and flanks were orange-buff, the belly and vent whiter, not uniform but with scattered orange-buff feathers. The legs were black.

Although it appeared to be a Heuglin's Wheatear *O. heuglini*, in order to rule out other possible *Oenanthe* spp., we thereafter paid special attention to all that we saw (tens of Northern Wheatears, a few Isabelline Wheatears *O. isabellina* and one Black-eared Wheatear *O. hispanica*) in January and February that year and in January 2008 in SW Mauritania. Moreover, we are familiar with Desert Wheatear *O. deserti* in Morocco and the Middle East. These observations confirmed us in our belief that the bird we report here was a Heuglin's Wheatear. The wing plumage of this bird was fresh, which explained the uniform brown colour and the thin, regular and clear fringes of the coverts and remiges. It was acquiring fresh feathers on the breast and belly which explained the sparse new orange-buff feathers on the underparts.

This appears to be the first record of Heuglin's Wheatear for Senegal (Morel & Morel 1990, Keith *et al.* 1992, Borrow & Demey 2001, Hoyo *et al.* 2005). It is a rare to locally common migrant between the W African sahel and savanna zones, and is recorded from nearby in southern Mauritania, and in Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso.

We thank Dr Volker Salewski for reading and commenting on this note, and Paul St Pierre for English corrections.



Figure 1. Painting from field notes of the Heuglin's Wheatear seen in Djoudj N.P., Senegal, 18 Jan 2007 (painting: A. Le Nevé).

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Received 21 March 2011

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Movements of a Lesser Flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor* in West Africa

West Africa hosts the smallest and least known population of the Lesser Flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor* (Trolliet & Fouquet 2001, Childress 2005, Childress *et al.* 2008). In 2009, the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology initiated a project to investigate movements of Lesser Flamingos by satellite telemetry (Salewski *et al.*

2010a). As part of this project one adult Lesser Flamingo was equipped with a solar-powered GPS satellite transmitter at Lac Khar in Djoudj National Park, Senegal, on 11 Feb 2010 (Salewski *et al.* 2010b). This transmitter stopped sending data on 9 Nov 2010.

The bird's main movements are described in Table 1 and its flight paths in Fig. 1. It first moved to Aftout es Saheli in Mauritania, where a group of Lesser Flamingos had started breeding (Isenmann *et al.* 2010, VS & Ould Sidaty pers. obs.), but after about a week it was back in Djoudj NP, near the initial capture site. In April it moved back to Mauritania but after two days there it flew non-stop for about 525 km to Guinea Bissau, during the night of 16–17 Apr. After some movements over four days in this country it moved about 175 km to Guinea and a few days later another 170 km back to Guinea Bissau. It stayed there until October, then moved back to Guinea, where the transmitter stopped sending data.

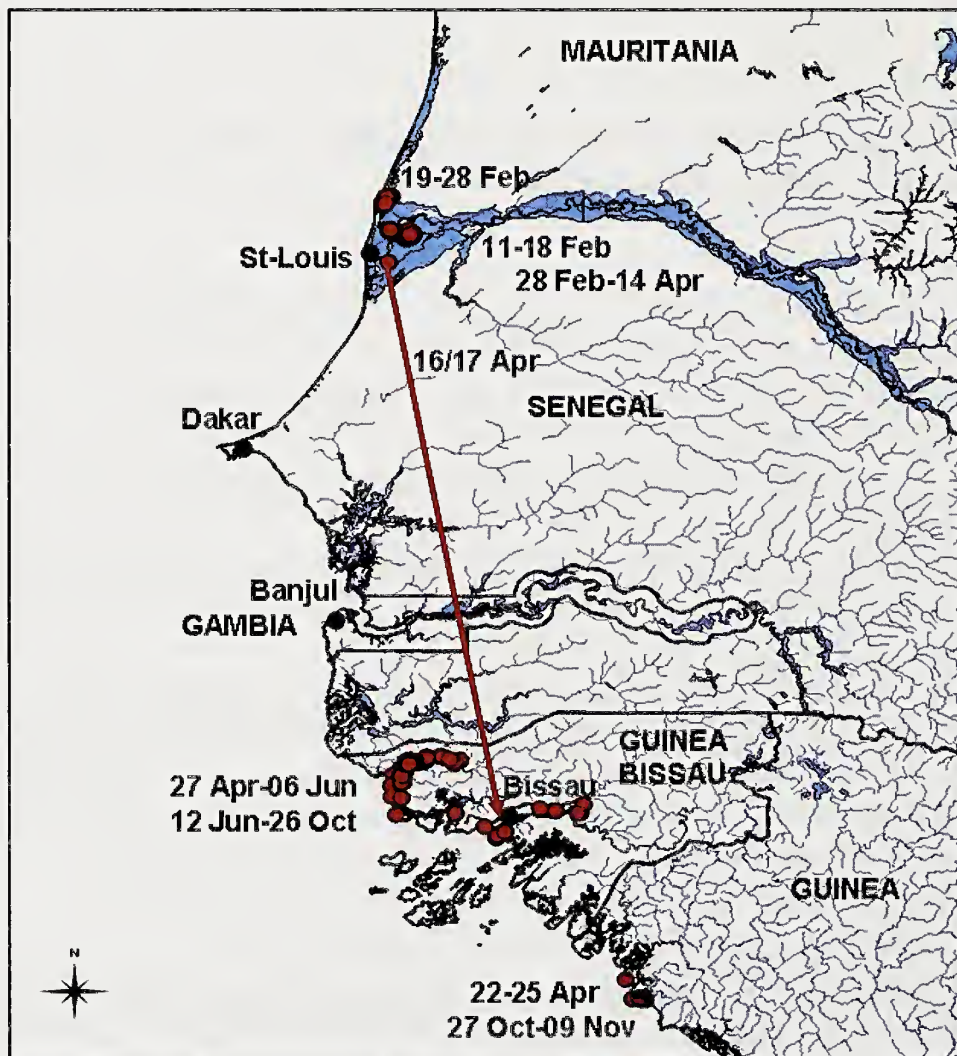


Figure 1. Movements of a Lesser Flamingo equipped with a satellite transmitter in West Africa. Shown are the daily locations (red dots), the dates of stay at the major staging areas and the main movement from the Senegal valley to Guinea Bissau (red arrow).

Table 1. Movements of a Lesser Flamingo equipped with a satellite transmitter in West Africa. Date is when the bird was first recorded at a locality; distance is minimum distance from previous locality. Most movements of < 35 km are omitted.

Date (2010)	Locality	Distance (km)
11 Feb	Captured at Lac Khar, Djoudj NP, Senegal	
19 Feb	Aftout es Saheli, Diawling NP, Mauritania	35
28 Feb	Grand Lac, Djoudj NP, Senegal	35
15 Apr	Bassin du Diawling, Diawling NP, Mauritania	18
17 Apr	Mouth of the Geba River near Bissau, Guinea Bissau	525
20 Apr	Geba River near Ganjauara, Guinea Bissau	70
21 Apr	Mouth of the Geba River near Bissau, Guinea Bissau	70
22 Apr	Near Kamsar ¹ , Guinea	175
26 Apr	Near Colicunda, Guinea Bissau	170
26 Apr	Mouth of the Geba River near Bissau, Guinea Bissau	50
27 Apr	Near Cacheu, Guinea Bissau	80
7 Jun	Near Colicunda, Guinea Bissau	115
12 Jun	Near Cacheu, Guinea Bissau	90
27 Oct	Near Kamsar ¹ , Guinea	265
9 Nov	Last data transmitted from near Kamsar, Guinea	

¹Coordinates similar to those of the site called Khonibenki by Trollet & Fouquet (2001).

The movements described above support suggestions by Trollet & Fouquet (2001) that fluctuations of Lesser Flamingo numbers in Guinea may be due to movements from the Senegal delta. They counted 1600 and 1300 Lesser Flamingos in January 1999 and 2000 respectively, but 10,900 in December 2000 and 13,000 in January 2002, at Khonibenki, close to Kamsar (Trollet & Fouquet 2001, Trollet *et al.* 2007). The shallow lakes used by Lesser Flamingos in the Djoudj National Park (> 45,000 counted in the Senegal delta in February 1990, Trollet & Fouquet 2001) hold water only temporarily. They dry out some months after the rainy season, forcing the birds to leave. At Lac Khar and Grand Lac, Lesser Flamingos are found only from January to April (I. Diop pers. com.). The movement of the tagged bird may indicate where they go during the dry season, as the tagged bird visited rivers, estuaries, mudflats or shallow lagoons that hold water permanently. However, large numbers of Lesser Flamingos also occur permanently in the Senegal delta (Isenmann *et al.* 2010).

Although the tag transmitted data for only nine months, a similar project with Lesser Flamingos in Kenya shows that satellite tags can transmit data for up to seven years (Childress *et al.* 2007, BC unpubl. data). As of April 2011, four Lesser Flamingos equipped with satellite transmitters in Ethiopia and eight out of 15 tagged in Kenya by the Max Planck Institute in 2009 continued to send data.

R. Mayer kindly helped with the preparation of Fig. 1.

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Received 21 February 2011; revised 18 April 2011

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Nocturnal roosting by Piapiacs *Ptilostomus afer* on a dockyard crane in Lagos, Nigeria

The Piapiac *Ptilostomus afer* is mainly a savanna species often associated with palm trees and villages (Fry 2000, Madge 2009). In Lagos, SW Nigeria, it is common in suburbs (Fry 2000). Its roosting habits have been reported only in general terms: Fry (2000) wrote that they often roost in palm crowns, and fly “to roost in compact flock,

uttering ‘pee-ip’ calls”. We describe here what must be atypical behaviour, given the scarcity of large cranes in the Piapiac’s range.

In a small dockyard on Victoria Island, Lagos, is a large waterside tower crane on runners. Two slender metal towers, one supporting a single large lamp, and the other, much shorter, capped with a cluster of unused floodlights (“floodlight tower”) are situated between the dockyard sheds. Piapiacs roost on the tower crane all year, and in January 2011 a pair of Black Kites *Milvus migrans* had a nest on it. For four evenings from 10–13 Jan 2011 we watched singles, pairs and parties of Piapiacs come to roost at the site. With sunset around 18h45 (never visible owing to harmattan haze) the birds appeared around 18h10, an hour after dockyard activity had subsided. They assembled in ones (rarely), twos or threes, usually in silence, from various directions. Over the next hour their cohesion appeared loose. Birds did not stay on their first perches, including those that had initially settled on the crane. Single birds often left a pair or group and flew off, often followed shortly by others. On the crane, the Piapiacs selected the most complex, perhaps least exposed parts, under the cabin and under the ballast structure. When one of the Black Kites flew to the back of the crane, Piapiacs there showed it moderate aggression, and once two of them displaced the raptor. Otherwise the Piapiacs showed little concern for the kites, but occasionally gave a sharp alarm call, *skwik skwik skwik*, in response to kite movements.

From 18h30 to 19h00 the Piapiacs often preened, sometimes allopreened (crown and scapular areas), and wiped their bills on their metal perches. The birds still occasionally moved between structures or out of sight into a garden area behind the sheds, but began to focus on the floodlight tower where their numbers increased, with by 19h00 up to ten birds on it at one time. Between 19h00 and 19h13 (when the first bats appeared) they flew silently in groups of four or five to the crane. On 13 January the total number on the crane was 14.

The crane is likely to be relatively free of nocturnal predators such as owls, snakes and mammals. However, the pre-roosting behaviour suggests careful assessment of the site in advance of its occupation for the night.

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Received 17 January 2011; revised 18 January 2011

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The first records of Kupe Bush-Shrike *Malaconotus kupeensis* at two sites in Nigeria

Previously, the Kupe Bush-Shrike *Malaconotus kupeensis* was thought to be endemic to the forests of western Cameroon, being known only from the montane forests of Mount Kupe (Serle 1951), the Bakossi Mountains (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1998) and the southern sector of the Banyang Mbo Wildlife Sanctuary (Stattersfield & Capper 2000). Here we present three records of five individuals recorded at two localities in Cross River State, Nigeria: a total of three birds in the Boshi Extension Forest in 2004 and 2007, and in 2010 a pair in Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Nigerian and Cameroon montane highlands, with forests with Kupe Bush-Shrike records shaded.

On 16 Dec 2004, at c. 15h00, a single individual was sighted by MG in Boshi Extension Forest of Cross River National Park (CRNP), Okwangwo Division

(6°26'16''N, 9°19'26''E), at *c.* 1500 m altitude. The bird was observed for *c.* 30 s in pristine montane forest (Fig. 2). The distinctive features of grey crown and mantle, white throat, grey breast and belly, yellow vent, olive-green back, black bill and black mask separated from grey crown by white line, were recorded. There was a black neckline separating the white throat and grey breast. The bird made two short grating calls, one immediately after the other. These were similar to F. Dowsett-Lemaire's recording from Cameroon (Chappuis 2000). A recording was made (by MG) using a Sony MZ-R90 digital recorder (Fig. 3), and has been deposited at the British Library of Wildlife Sounds. On 23 Jun 2007, at *c.* 15h00, a foraging Kupe Bush-Shrike was sighted by II in the same area (6°25'57''N, 9°19'44''E) at 1472 m. It was shortly joined by a second; the birds then continued to forage together. They were observed for *c.* 10 min., in primary forest with an open understorey, on a steep rocky slope. Both had grey crown and mantle, black bill, a white line separating black mask from grey crown, white throat separated from grey breast by an unbroken black neckline, olive-green back and yellow vent. They both gleaned insect larvae from under leaves and tree branches at heights between 8 m and 12 m. The habitat was similar to that in which two individuals were recorded on Mt Kupe in Cameroon by Dowsett-Lemaire (1999).



Figure 2. Montane forest with grassland in the foreground, in the Boshi Extension of Cross River National Park, where Kupe Bush-Shrike was observed in 2004.

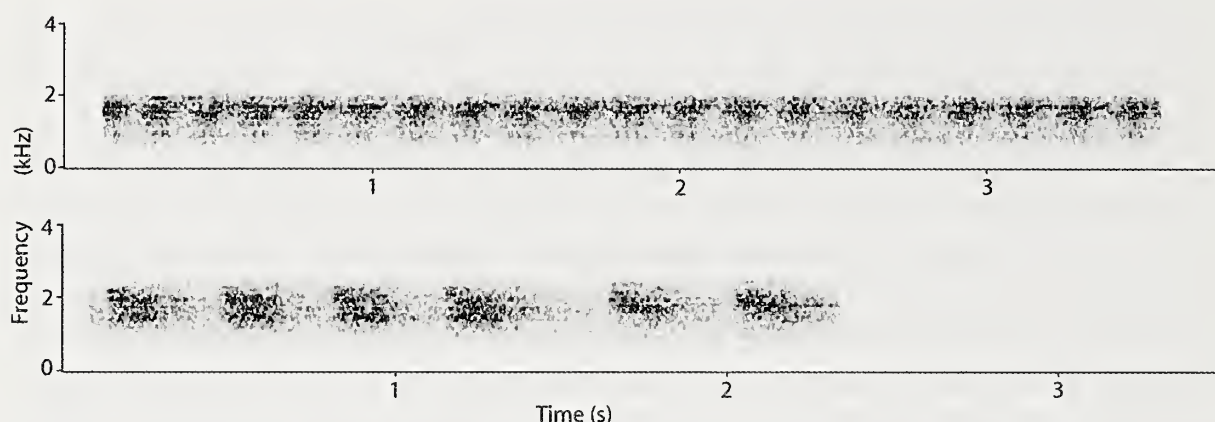


Figure 3. Frequency spectrogram of two calls made by the Kupe Bush-Shrike in Boshi Extension Forest. The second call was made almost immediately after the first.

On 6 May 2010, at *c.* 11h00, a pair of Kupe Bush-Shrikes was recorded by DTCC in Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary ($6^{\circ}18'30''\text{N}$, $8^{\circ}57'37''\text{E}$) at *c.* 850 m. The birds were observed for 2–3 min., in primary forest with a clear understorey on a steep-sided mountain ridge. Both had grey crown and mantle, black mask and bill with a white line above the mask, and white throat separated from grey belly by a distinctive unbroken black neckline. They both had olive-green back and rump and yellow vent. The apparent pair was gleaning insects on tree branches *c.* 8 m above the ground; both birds made regular grating contact calls, at intervals of 0–14 s (see Chappuis 2000). The lowest altitude at which Kupe Bush-Shrike has previously been recorded was *c.* 900 m on Mt Kupe (Harris & Franklin 2000), with 26 records ranging between 950 and 1450 m (Bowden 2001). The low altitude of the Afi record may result from the fact that the mountain peak is only 1318 m high, resulting in there being less than 18 km² of forest above 800 m (Bergl *et al.* 2007).

Previous observers of this species in Cameroon have noted the presence of either a maroon throat spot or a black necklace. It has been suggested that this may indicate either sexual dimorphism (Fry 2000), or age (Dowsett-Lamaire 2004) with the maroon patch developing after the necklace (a necklace was recorded on the only immature specimen: Serle 1951). None of the five birds recorded in Nigeria was observed to have a maroon patch, suggesting that the patch is more likely related to age and not to sexual dimorphism.

Records of this species at two sites in Nigeria are a positive sign for the long term survival of this species, which has been classed as Endangered due to its restricted habitat range, low population density and habitat loss (<www.iucnredlist.org>, consulted 15 Jan 2011). However, due to the low recorded population densities within these montane “island” habitats, coupled with the high human pressure on the forests, we suggest that the classification should remain as Endangered. The records presented here suggest that populations may also occur in lesser surveyed montane forests of Cameroon and Nigeria. More surveys might therefore expand the known range of this

species. Our observations highlight the biodiversity value of these two sites and the need for their conservation.

We thank the Leventis Conservation Foundation, without which none of these observations would have been made, and the Wildlife Conservation Society, for their support of the 2004 and 2007 expeditions. Mr S.O. Abdulsalam, Director of CRNP, provided important support and discussion during the 2004 field trip. Thanks to H. Coneybeare and C. Radcliff for cleaning up the sonograms. This is publication number 47 from the A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute.

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Received 21 January 2011; revised 18 April 2011

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News & Letters — Nouvelles & Lettres

Bird atlas of Mauritania: request for information

A new annotated checklist of the birds of Mauritania has been published but without distribution maps. Bruno Walther and I aim to fill the gap with an atlas and kindly request ornithologists and birders to send records to me at the email address below.

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Reviews — Revues

Oiseaux de Mauritanie — Birds of Mauritania, by P. Isenmann, M. Benmergui, P. Browne, A.D. Ba, C.H. Diagana, Y. Diawara & Z.E.A.ould Sidaty (2010). 408 pp. Société d'Etudes Ornithologiques de France, Paris. ISBN 2-916802-02-9 (paperback), € 38.

Although covered mostly by desert, Mauritania is very interesting for ornithologists. It is a region where the Afrotropical and Palaearctic meet, as shown for example by the sympatric breeding of species like the African Grey Woodpecker *Dendropicos goertae* and the Palaearctic Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata* near the oasis of Ouadâne. Furthermore Mauritania is of utmost importance for Palaearctic migrants. The Parc National du Banc d'Arguin stands out as a stopover and wintering site for waders along the East Atlantic Flyway, as does the Parc National du Diawling in the valley of the Senegal River with the only known breeding site of Lesser Flamingos *Phoeniconais minor* in West Africa. Both regions are also important as breeding sites for herons, gulls and terns. The Banc d'Arguin is unique in Africa by hosting a combined number of 25,000 to 50,000 breeding pairs of 16 species including an endemic subspecies of the Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia balsaci* and an endemic heron *Ardea monicae*. The southern fringe of the desert and oases within it are important refuelling areas for migrating birds especially in spring before crossing the desert. However, previous species lists of the birds of Mauritania were either out of date, of a preliminary character or were difficult to obtain, and a comprehensive work dealing with the avifauna of the entire country was wanting. This has changed with the publication of this new book by Paul Isenmann and his co-workers.

The informative introduction covers the geography and climate of the country, the history of ornithology and the biogeographical affinities of breeding birds, followed by an account on Palaearctic-Afrotropical migration in Mauritania. In these chapters the readers are informed that some 155 species have been found breeding in the country, that the great majority of passerine migrants across the Sahara stops during the day and migrates during the night whereas in larger non-passerines the migration strategy varies according to species, and that the Banc d'Arguin alone hosts 50 % of all the waders wintering in Africa. Conservation problems are also mentioned. General problems include habitat degradation by wood-cutting and the invasion of cattail following the permanent flooding of large areas of the Senegal delta. Specific examples in the species accounts include the probable extinction of the Ostrich *Struthio camelus* and the decline in numbers of several bustard species due to hunting.

As usual for this kind of book, the introduction is followed by the annotated checklist, where all 506 bird species that have been convincingly recorded in the country are described. It is a great advantage that all texts in the book are in both French and English. The species accounts are informative and vary in length according to the knowledge that exists about each species. The authors exhaustively compiled all available information about birds in the country; an immense effort that is reflected in the bibliography at the end of the book, which is itself a valuable resource. More extensive accounts are divided by subheadings such as "breeding" and "nesting data", or "wintering" and "origin" (for migrants). There are no distribution maps, but these should not be expected for such a large country in which only a few regions have been visited by ornithologists regularly and vast areas not at all. The book is made more attractive by numbers of colour plates that intersperse the text, with photographs taken mainly by Maurice Benmergui.

The main species list is followed by a list of 86 species that have been previously reported for the country but which were excluded from the main list due to insufficient documentation. This is warranted for the majority of the mentioned species and increases the reliability of the information of the book. However, some of these species, such as Little Crane *Porzana parva* and Red-chested Swallow *Hirundo lucida*, will probably be recorded for Mauritania in the future as they are observed more or less regularly in the Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj in Senegal (pers. obs.), just south of the Senegal River, the border between the two countries. It is however not clear why some of these species are not listed under the following list of species that occur nearby in Senegal.

In conclusion, this is a book that all ornithologists interested in the avifauna of West Africa have long been waiting for. It fulfils the first of its tasks mentioned in the introduction, to reflect adequately the present state of knowledge of the birds in Mauritania. Let us hope that it will also fulfil its second task, to promote the study and protection of birds in the country.

Volker Salewski

Society Notices — Informations de la Société

Gérard Morel, 1925–2011

En pensant à Gérard Morel, deux impressions marquantes me reviennent à l'esprit, à 40 ans d'intervalle. La première fois, quand étudiant thésard, je pénétrais pour la première fois dans son laboratoire de Richard-Toll, oasis climatisée au milieu de rizières surchauffées alors grouillantes d'oiseaux. La seconde, lors d'une visite récente au Sénégal, quand j'écoutais avec quelle profonde admiration deux de ses anciens collaborateurs africains me parlaient de lui, comme si leur travail commun n'avait pas cessé. Quatre décennies, c'est aussi la durée d'une vie professionnelle que Gérard consacra entièrement aux oiseaux et au Sénégal qu'il ne voulut pas quitter par fidélité à l'équipe qu'il avait formée et par souci de pérenniser les connaissances acquises. Arrivé en bateau dès 1953 pour y étudier la biologie du Quéléa, il eut pour premier contact le Prof. T. Monod, alors directeur de l'Institut français d'Afrique noire (IFAN) et surtout l'appui indéfectible du Prof. F. Bourlière, longtemps l'une des personnalités centrales de l'écologie française. C'est ainsi qu'à l'indépendance du Sénégal, il intégra l'O.R.S.T.O.M. (aujourd'hui I.R.D.) qui fit de Richard-Toll, dans le nord du pays, sa principale station de terrain, et la seule consacrée à l'ornithologie, soigneusement construite et gérée par Gérard et son épouse Marie-Yvonne jusqu'à leur départ en 1992. L'ornithologie ouest africaine de cette époque n'était guère développée qu'au Nigéria et les deux volumes du Bannerman tenaient lieu de seul guide de terrain pour les ornithologues qui s'aventuraient alors dans cette partie de l'Afrique. La collecte d'oiseaux et la constitution d'une collection de référence étaient encore considérées comme indispensables à la connaissance d'une avifaune et comme base de toute étude. C'est à cela que Gérard Morel se consacra d'abord, méticuleusement et systématiquement, formant une équipe d'africains, du collecteur au taxidermiste, qui tentent aujourd'hui encore de préserver cet acquis. Ce fut l'occasion de bien des découvertes et de l'identification précise des sous espèces présentes au Sénégal, mais ce fut aussi une base de deux publications majeures: le premier guide moderne d'identification des oiseaux de l'Ouest Africain (Serle, W. & Morel, G.J. 1977, Collins, Londres; adaptée dès 1979 en français) et une avifaune de Sénégal (Morel, G.J. & Morel, M.-Y. 1990, O.R.S.T.O.M., Paris). Gérard testa aussi les méthodes, alors nouvelles, de recensement des oiseaux (par quadrats, transects ou points) fournissant ainsi les premières données pour l'Afrique de densités d'oiseaux nicheurs et migrants et de leurs relations dans une savane sahélienne. La biologie, la reproduction et la dynamique des granivores (Quelea, Moineau doré et même Tourterelle des bois) l'occupèrent aussi beaucoup à une époque où leurs statuts changeaient (sécheresse, mises en cultures).

Nombre de chercheurs se rendirent à Richard-Toll pour bénéficier de ses connaissances ou pour cosigner des publications, non seulement des français (C. Chappuis, J. Dorst, R.D. Etchécopar, R. de Naurois, F. Roux *etc.*) mais aussi anglophones (R.E. Moreau, N. and E. Collias...) qui l'invitèrent ensuite jusqu'aux Etats-Unis ou à Rome (F.A.O.). Tous appréciaient l'hospitalité des Morel, leur parfaite organisation sur le terrain, et aussi leurs spécialités culinaires, telles les charcuteries de phacochère dont je me souviens encore. Tout naturellement, Gérard établit alors des liens privilégiés avec les ornithologues travaillant au Nigéria (R.E. Sharland, C.H. Fry...) avec lesquels il cofonda la Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest Africain en 1979 dont il fut neuf ans Vice-président, puis 19 ans Président jusqu'à son retrait en 2006. Il y joua un rôle actif dans son organisation, jusqu'à la création de son site internet et la tenue de réunions de la Société en Normandie et de son Conseil à son domicile. Il participa activement aussi à tous les congrès Panafricains d'ornithologie depuis le premier et ne cessa d'y promouvoir le travail des francophones, comme aussi le bilinguisme, facilitant la présence des africains francophones.

Les temps ont beaucoup changé au cours de cette seconde moitié du 20ème siècle, l'ornithologie et même les oiseaux du Sénégal aussi. Mais c'est à des personnalités discrètes, obstinées, rigoureuses et passionnées comme celle de Gérard Morel que l'on



Deux images de Gérard Morel: lors de la réunion SOOA de 1994 aux Pays-Bas (photographe inconnu) et chez lui à Richard-Toll, vers 1980 (photo: Peter Browne). — Two facets of Gerard Morel: at the 1994 W.A.O.S. meeting in the Netherlands (photographer unknown) and in his home at Richard-Toll, c. 1980 (photo: Peter Browne).

doit nos acquis d'aujourd'hui. Je peux en témoigner personnellement, ayant vécu ces changements en Afrique de l'Ouest et ailleurs, au contact de tels pionniers. Les jeunes ornithologues visitant aujourd'hui le Sénégal, et y faisant parfois des découvertes impensables autrefois, ou même parcourant le site internet de notre Société, auront sans doute perdu le souvenir de tels précurseurs. Qu'ils sachent pourtant que d'autres comme Gérard Morel leur ont patiemment ouvert la voie, défriché les connaissances de base indispensables, et cela dans des conditions matérielles et techniques beaucoup moins faciles qu'aujourd'hui. Qui accepterait de nos jours de rester 35 ans dans une bourgade isolée dans le savane pour y documenter de façon rigoureuse et indiscutable l'étude de son avifaune? Merci à Gérard de nous avoir ainsi permis d'avancer dans l'étude et la connaissance des oiseaux de l'Ouest Africain.

Jean-Marc Thiollay
Président de la S.O.O.A.

Gérard Morel, 1925–2011

When thinking of Gérard Morel, two particular impressions come to mind, separated by 40 years. The first was when, as a doctoral student, I entered his laboratory at Richard-Toll, an air-conditioned oasis in the middle of stifling rice fields, at that time seething with birds. The second was during a recent visit to Senegal, when I heard with what deep admiration two of his former African collaborators spoke of him, as if their shared work had never stopped. Four decades is also the duration of the professional life which Gérard devoted entirely to birds and to Senegal, with which he persisted out of loyalty to the team that he had created and a desire to consolidate the knowledge acquired. Arriving by ship in 1953 to study *Quelea* biology, his first contact was Prof. T. Monod, then Director of the *Institut français d'Afrique noire* (IFAN) and he also benefited from the infallible support of Prof. F. Bourlière, for many years one of the central personalities of French ecology. On the independence of Senegal, he joined O.R.S.T.O.M. (now I.R.D.), which chose Richard-Toll in the north of the country for its main field station and its only one dedicated to ornithology, to be carefully constructed and managed by Gérard and his wife Marie-Yvonne until their departure in 1992. At that time, West African ornithology was poorly developed except in Nigeria, and the "two-volume Bannerman" was the only field guide for ornithologists in that part of Africa. Collecting birds for a reference collection was then considered indispensable for the study of an avifauna, and Gérard first devoted himself to training, systematically and meticulously, a team of African collectors and taxidermists, who maintain the skills acquired to this day. This was the opportunity to discover and determine the subspecies present in Senegal, but it was also the basis for two major publications: the first modern identification guide to the birds of West Africa (Serle, W. & Morel G.J. 1977, Collins, London; translated

into French in 1979) and an authoritative checklist of the birds of Senegambia (Morel, G.J. & Morel, M.-Y. 1990, O.R.S.T.O.M., Paris). Gérard also tested newly developed methods for censusing birds (by quadrats, transects or points), thus providing the first calculations for Africa of the densities of breeding birds and migrants, and their relationships in a Sahel savanna. The biology, breeding and dynamics of granivores (Quelea, Golden Sparrow and Turtle Dove) also occupied him much during a period when their status was changing as a result of drought and conversion of land to agriculture.

Numerous researchers visited Richard-Toll to learn from Gérard or to co-author publications, not only from France (*e.g.* C. Chappuis, J. Dorst, R.D. Etchécopar, R. de Naurois, F. Roux) but also from elsewhere (*e.g.* R.E. Moreau, N. and E. Collias), resulting in invitations to the U.S.A and Rome (F.A.O.). All appreciated the Morels' hospitality, their perfect organisation in the field and their culinary specialities, including warthog cold cuts, which I remember very well. Gérard naturally established close links with ornithologists working in Nigeria, such as R.E. Sharland and C.H. Fry, with whom he founded the West African Ornithological Society in 1979, of which he was Vice-President for nine years then President for 19, until 2006. He played an active role in our Society, including the creation of its web site and the organisation of W.A.O.S. meetings in Normandy and Council meetings at his home there. He participated actively in the Pan-African Ornithological Congresses since the first one, and never ceased to promote the work of French-speaking ornithologists and bilingualism, and foster the attendance of francophone Africans.

There were great changes during the second half of the 20th century, in ornithology as well as for the birds of Senegal. But it is to quiet, persistent, rigorous and passionate individuals such as Gérard Morel that we owe today's knowledge. I can personally testify, having lived through these changes in West Africa and elsewhere, to the contribution of such pioneers. Young ornithologists visiting Senegal today, perhaps making discoveries unthinkable in those days, or perhaps browsing the WAOS web site, may not be aware of the role of such predecessors. May they understand the extent to which people like Gérard Morel patiently opened the way for them and established an indispensable basis of knowledge, under difficult conditions and with equipment and techniques much less well developed than today. Who would accept these days to live 35 years in an isolated savanna village to document an avifauna so rigorously? We owe Gérard our thanks for having laid the foundations that enable us to advance the study and knowledge of the birds of West Africa.

Jean-Marc Thiollay
W.A.O.S. President

Introducing our new Webmaster

Ulf Liedén has agreed to take over the management of the W.A.O.S. web site and has already begun managing the site. Ulf is a Swedish national presently living in Germany. Inspired by his father, he has had an interest in plants and birds since childhood, first only looking at them, later photographing them as a serious amateur. He became involved with the birds of West Africa when his wife took a job in Niamey, Niger in 2007. Being a professional computer programmer as well, he ended up designing and managing the Niger Bird DataBase, which holds many of his own bird pictures. Ulf looks forward to managing the W.A.O.S. web site and building on the good work of his predecessor, Peter Browne. Council welcomes Ulf and joins him in thanking Peter for his excellent work on the site over the past seven years.

W.A.O.S. Council



Ulf Liedén, new W.A.O.S. Webmaster — Ulf Liedén, nouveau Webmestre de la S.O.O.A.

Présentation de notre nouveau Webmestre

Ulf Liedén a accepté de prendre en charge la gestion du site Internet de la S.O.O.A. et il a déjà commencé. Ulf est de nationalité Suédoise et réside actuellement en Allemagne. Inspiré par son père, il s'intéresse aux plantes et aux oiseaux depuis son enfance, d'abord seulement en les observant, puis plus tard en les photographiant en amateur confirmé. Il s'est intéressé de plus près aux oiseaux d'Afrique de l'Ouest quand sa femme a été affectée à Niamey, Niger, en 2007. Informaticien professionnel, il est devenu le concepteur et gestionnaire de la Base de Données sur les Oiseaux du Niger, qui contient nombre de ses photos d'oiseaux. Ulf est maintenant prêt à gérer le site Internet de la S.O.O.A. et à le développer dans la continuité du bon travail de son prédécesseur, Peter Browne. Le Conseil souhaite la bienvenue à Ulf et se joint à lui pour remercier Peter de l'excellent travail réalisé sur le site pendant sept années.

Conseil de la S.O.O.A.

W.A.O.S. membership changes Changements dans la liste d'adhérents de la S.O.O.A.

New members — Nouveaux membres

BUIJ, R., Prof Fockema Andreaelaan 39, 3741 EJ Baarn, **The Netherlands**

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Resignations, deaths and deletions — Renonciations, décès et enlèvements

MOREL, Dr G.J.

COS Exchange

Name and address changes and corrections — Changements et corrections de nom ou adresse

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MUSÉUM NATIONAL D'HISTOIRE NATURELLE, Bibliothèque des Mammifères et des Oiseaux, 57 rue Cuvier, 75231 Paris Cedex 05, **France**

ERNST MAYR LIBRARY, MUSEUM COMP. ZOOLOGY, Harvard University, 26 Oxford St, Cambridge, MA 02138, **U.S.A.**

THE PEREGRINE FUND, 5668 West Flying Hawk Lane, Boise, Idaho 83709, **U.S.A.**

T. Dodman

Instructions aux Auteurs

Malimbus publie des articles de recherche, des revues de publications et des nouvelles traitant de l'ornithologie ouest-africaine.

Les **Articles** et les **Notes Courtes** doivent être des apports originaux; ceux déjà publiés ailleurs, en partie ou en totalité, seront normalement refusés. Les Notes Courtes sont des articles de moins de 1500 mots (références comprises) ou de quatre pages imprimées. Autant que possible, les manuscrits auront été au préalable soumis à au moins un ornithologue ou biologiste pour un examen minutieux. Les manuscrits seront envoyés pour critique à au moins un lecteur compétent.

Les textes des **Nouvelles & Lettres** ne devraient pas dépasser 1000 mots.

Les **textes** sont acceptés en anglais et en français; la Rédaction pourra aider les auteurs dont la langue maternelle n'est pas l'une de celles-ci. Nous préférons les envois de manuscrits par email (en pièce jointe). Consultez le Rédacteur pour plus de détails, par ex. les logiciels compatibles.

Tous les Articles (mais non les Notes Courtes) comporteront un **Résumé**, n'excédant pas 5% de la longueur totale. Le Résumé mentionnera brièvement les principaux résultats et conclusions de l'Article et ne sera pas un simple compte rendu de ce qui a été fait. Les résumés seront publiés à la fois en anglais et en français (ou dans la langue officielle du pays dans lequel le travail a été réalisé) et seront traduits au mieux par la Rédaction.

La **présentation** des tableaux, chiffres, unités métriques, références, *etc.* doit correspondre à celles des numéros récents. A notez, en particulier: Les noms des auteurs doivent être listés en faisant précéder le nom de famille par le prénom ou des initiales (ex. John A. Smith); les dates seront écrites "2 fév 1990" mais les mois seuls pourront être écrits en entier; les heures seront écrites "6h45", "17h00"; les coordonnées "7°46'N, 16°4'W" (pas de zéros en tête); les nombres jusqu'à dix seront écrits en toutes lettres, excepté devant une unité de mesure (ex. 6 m); les nombres à partir de 11 seront écrits en chiffres sauf au début d'une phrase. Toutes les références citées dans l'article, et aucune autre, doivent figurer dans la bibliographie.

Les **articles sur l'avifaune** doivent comprendre une carte ou un index géographique, incluant tous les endroits cités. Ils doivent comporter quelques brèves indications sur le climat, la topographie, la végétation et les circonstances ou événements inhabituels avant ou pendant l'étude (ex. pluies tardives, *etc.*). Les **listes d'espèces** ne doivent contenir que des données importantes: les listes complètes ne sont justifiées que pour les régions encore non étudiées ou délaissées pendant longtemps. Autrement, ne citer que les espèces sur lesquelles l'étude fournit une information nouvelle sur la répartition, la période de séjour, la reproduction, *etc.* Pour chaque espèce, indiquer l'extension de l'aire de répartition, une estimation d'abondance (*Malimbus* 17: 38) et les données datées sur la reproduction; indiquer le statut migratoire et la période de séjour seulement tels qu'ils ressortent de l'étude. Eventuellement, replacer les données dans le contexte en les comparant brièvement avec une liste régionale de référence. Les longues listes d'espèces peuvent être présentées sous la forme de tableaux (ex. *Malimbus* 25: 4–30, 24: 15–22, 23: 1–22, 1: 22–28, or 1: 49–54) ou sous la forme rédigée des numéros récents. La **séquence taxonomique** et les **noms scientifiques** (et de préférence aussi les **noms vernaculaires**) doivent suivre Borrow & Demey (2001, *Birds of Western Africa*, Christopher Helm, London, avec des noms rectifiés de Borrow & Demey 2004, *Field Guide to the Birds of Western Africa*, Christopher Helm, London), ou *The Birds of Africa* (Brown *et al.* 1982, Urban *et al.* 1986, 1997, Fry *et al.* 1988, Keith *et al.* 1992, Fry & Keith 2000, 2004, Academic Press, London), à moins de donner les raisons de s'écarter de ces auteurs. Un **guide plus complet à l'intention aux auteurs** d'articles sur l'avifaune, comprenant l'échelle d'abondance des espèces conseillée, a été publié dans *Malimbus* 17: 35–39 et une version augmentée et actualisée de celle-ci mise sur le site internet (<http://malimbus.free.fr/instmale.htm>). La Rédaction se fera un plaisir de donner des conseils pour les études spécifiques.

Pour le dessin des **Figures**, et en particulier la taille des caractères, tenir compte des dimensions de la page de *Malimbus*. On préfère les figures préparées sur logiciel graphique approprié et sauvegardées en haute définition. Les fichiers de basse résolution et les impressions de mauvaise qualité seront refusés. Les auteurs sont encouragés à soumettre des **photographies** qui illustrent des points importants de leurs articles. Les photographies doivent être bien contrastées et de haute définition. Les figures et les photographies doivent être envoyées comme fichiers de logiciel graphique (par ex. jpg ou tif), et ne pas être incluses dans un fichier de Word et non pas être incluses dans un fichier de Word. Consulter le Rédacteur pour tout renseignement.

Un fichier pdf des Articles et des Notes Courtes, et une copie du numéro de publication seront envoyés gratis à l'auteur ou à l'auteur principal.



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